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CHAPTER 6

# What Are the Limits to the Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping?

*Mats Berdal*

## Introduction

The use and utility of military force have been central, if sometimes underlying and unarticulated, themes in discussions about the purposes, practices, and, indeed, the very identity of United Nations peacekeeping since its inception. The precise historical and normative context within which those discussions have taken place has necessarily evolved over time. And yet, as the 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) makes clear, many of the key questions raised by the use of force in peacekeeping—be they of a practical or conceptual kind—are not fundamentally new (UN 2015). Chief among these is an overarching question that also frames and animates the present chapter, to wit, what are the limits to the use of force in UN peacekeeping? In approaching this question, the chapter and the arguments it advances have been divided into three closely connected parts.[1]

[1] Some of these arguments, especially in part three, draw upon and are more fully developed in Mats Berdal (2016).

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The first of these seeks to locate current preoccupations regarding the use of force within a wider historical context. To this end, it briefly traces both the thinking and practice around the use of force by UN blue helmets from the conceptual foundations laid in the era of "classical peacekeeping" to the focus on the protection of civilians (POC) and "robust peacekeeping" that have come to define the period since the Brahimi Panel Report of 2000 (UN 2000). It highlights how changes in geopolitical context and normative expectations have shaped and broadened the scope and aims of UN peacekeeping in important ways, with direct implications for the use of force. It also notes, however, that third-party involvement in civil war-like situations—as in South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Darfur, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where more than 80,000 peacekeepers are currently deployed—have brought to the fore cross-cutting challenges and policy dilemmas of a more fundamental kind when it comes to the application of military force by UN peacekeepers.

Developing the argument further, part two dwells on two sets of limitations to the effective use of force in UN operations. The first of these may be viewed as *structural barriers* to military effectiveness in UN operations, that is, limitations built in, as it were, to the very machinery and system for mounting, conducting, and sustaining UN peacekeeping operations. While some of the constraints thus imposed can be mitigated through reform of practices and procedures, to the extent that they are rooted in the intergovernmental and political character of the UN as an institution, they can never be fully overcome. This is an oft-neglected reality that will continue to place significant constraints on the effective use of force by blue helmets in the future. Indeed, as will be argued more fully, with UN missions now routinely deployed in conditions of actual or latent civil war, entrusted with POC responsibilities and given mandates that allow for the robust use of force, the debilitating impact of inbuilt capability constraints on force cohesion and military effectiveness has become ever more acute.

Added to these structural, seemingly quasi-organic impediments to effectiveness in UN peacekeeping is a second set of limitations. These are the political and practical challenges that inevitably present themselves to a peacekeeping force deployed as an impartial third party in conditions of on-going or unfinished civil war, that is, in conditions of persistent insecurity and violence fuelled by power struggles among political elites for control of territory, populations, and governmental authority.

Over time, and indeed wherever the UN has deployed, such conditions have also given rise to distinctive, complex, and frequently mutating political economies of conflict, the dynamics of which the UN, with its limited analytical capacities both at its headquarters in New York and in the field, has struggled to grasp, let alone factor into policy. Any assessment of the prospects for the effective use of force by UN peacekeepers, nearly all of which are now deployed in situations of internal conflict, must take these realities into account.

The third and final section of the chapter looks in greater detail at the record of "robust peacekeeping" and the kind of lessons that can reasonably be drawn from operations since the late 1990s. In brief, it argues that the use of force in Sierra Leone (2000), Haiti (2006–2007) and the DRC (2003) all suggest that, at the *tactical level*, a properly equipped and properly commanded force can be used with decisive, albeit short-term, effect in response to immediate crises or emergencies. The larger *strategic* lesson from the history of robust peacekeeping since 1999, however, is, fundamentally, a far more cautionary one; one that highlights the need for the activities of peacekeepers to be much more closely aligned than they have become over the past decade and half to the search for durable and inclusive political settlements to disputes. As such, it is a conclusion that echoes one of the central messages of the HIPPO, and which has also emerged as an early theme of Antonio Guterres' tenure as the ninth Secretary-General of UN.

## From the Sinai to the Kivus

In a concise and intellectually compelling effort to distil from the UN's early forays into peacekeeping "certain basic principles and rules" that might "provide an adaptable framework for later operations," the then Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, identified the "prohibition against any *initiative* in the use of force" as one of UN peacekeeping's defining characteristics (Hammarskjold 1958). Alongside the principles of consent and impartiality, this commitment to minimum use of force except in self-defence came to constitute one of the core principles of so-called classical peacekeeping, defining its character as a distinctive form of third-party intervention involving the deployment of lightly equipped troops drawn from different member states and placed under UN command. Although the UN's peacekeeping experience during the Cold War was richer and more varied than is often assumed, that

experience did not lead to a fundamental questioning or re-examination of those principles. Indeed, even some of the most "painful peacekeeping" of the Cold War era—in the Congo in the early 1960s and South Lebanon between 1978 and 1982—were seen, in the final analysis, as a vindication of their importance (James 1983).

It was only with the changes in political climate spawned by the end of the Cold War that more radical ideas began to be floated about the future directions of UN operations and the sanctity of the principles on which these had traditionally been based. Between 1987 and 1992, the liberating impact of improvements in the international political landscape was demonstrated in a series of successful UN field operations from the Middle East and Asia to Central America and sub-Saharan Africa.[2] Although these operations were all, with one exception, comparatively modest in aim and small-scale in scope, they nonetheless contributed to a growing, if inchoate, sense that the long-established practices and functions of UN peacekeeping might now be developed in new and far more ambitious directions.[3] Thus, in *An Agenda for Peace*, released in June 1992 when the hopes and normative aspirations of international society were still closely aligned with the optimism of the early post-Cold War period, the newly appointed Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali urged the Security Council to "consider the utilization of peace-enforcement units in clearly defined circumstances" (UN 1992b). More suggestive still, he defined peacekeeping as involving the deployment of a UN presence "*hitherto* with the consent of all the parties concerned," (ibid., para. 20, my emphasis) thus hinting that the self-denying ordinance governing the use of force was ripe for re-examination.

Such optimism as could be gleaned from *An Agenda for Peace* proved, however, to be short-lived. Between 1992 and 1995, the horrors of Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, and former Yugoslavia—all places where UN peacekeepers had been deployed yet conspicuously failed to halt mass

[2]These included the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG), active from 1988 to 1991; the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) between 1988 and 1990; the UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM I) from 1988 to 1991; the United Nations Observer Group (ONUCA) established in 1989 and successfully terminated in 1992; as well as the larger, more complex and, ultimately, successful, UN Transition Assistance Group in Namibia (UNTAG) between 1989 and March 1990.

[3]For a revealing sense of the climate of optimism at the time, see the various presentations made by member states at the Security Council summit, the first of its kind, held in late January 1992 (UN 1992a).

atrocities—ushered in a profound crisis of UN peacekeeping. Taking stock in early 1995, Boutros Ghali issued a *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace*; a document markedly different in tone from the optimism of three years earlier and, more significantly, gloomy in its conclusions regarding the prospects for the use of force in peacekeeping operations. In essence, Boutros-Ghali called for a return to "basic principles," arguing that "peacekeeping and the use of force (other than in self-defence) had to be seen as alternative techniques and not as adjacent points on a continuum, permitting easy transition from one to the other" (UN 1995, para. 36). Both more rigorous and cogent in its analysis of the real-world challenges of post-Cold War peacekeeping than its precursor document, the *Supplement* rightly emphasised the limits of UN-led operations in civil war-like situations, especially so when member states were only prepared, as they had repeatedly demonstrated over the previous three years, to will the ends and not the means. Even so, the Secretary-General's intervention in early 1995 did not settle the discussion about the use of force by UN peacekeepers. The nature and the scale of UN's peacekeeping failures between 1992 and 1995 meant that, at one level, there simply could be no "return to basics." This would become even clearer some six months after the release of the *Supplement*, when the UN "safe area" of Srebrenica in Eastern Bosnia was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces. The bloody and horrific aftermath of Srebrenica's capture, just one year on from the genocide in Rwanda, inevitably and quite understandably influenced the subsequent evolution of UN peacekeeping and the discussion about its purposes.[4] As the spate of new operations since 1999 has shown, the apparent determination to ensure that the horrors of Rwanda and former Yugoslavia would never again be repeated on the UN's watch has emphatically *not* resolved the deeper tension between ends and means highlighted by the *Supplement*, tensions which, if anything, have become more acute. What it plainly has done, however, is to influence the mandate and change the operational focus of UN peacekeepers, with important implications for the question of the use of force.

The single most important manifestation of this change is the growing centrality of the "Protection of Civilians" (POC) as a task formally

[4] Contributing powerfully to this, were two detailed and damning inquires into UN's role in Rwanda and Srebrenica, both of them published in 1999. See "The Fall of Srebrenica" (UN 1999a) and "Report of the Independent Inquiry in UN actions During the Rwanda Genocide" (UN 1999b).

entrusted to UN peacekeepers. The Security Council first expressed "its willingness to consider how peacekeeping mandates might better address the negative impact of armed conflict on civilians" in September 1999 (UN 1999c, para. 11). Since then, POC has become the subject of regular debates by the Council and, more significantly, beginning with the establishment of the UN operation in Sierra Leone in October 1999, missions have routinely and expressly been mandated under Chapter VII of the Charter "to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence" (UN 1999d, para. 14). The growing focus on civilian protection is also a key factor behind the calls for more muscular, or robust, peacekeeping that have become such a notable feature of contemporary UN peacekeeping practice and discourse (UN 2009). Since 1999 the Council has given peacekeepers authority under Chapter VII of the Charter to "use all necessary means," or "take the necessary action," to accomplish their mission. In a number of individual operations, notably in Sierra Leone, Haiti, and the Congo, that authority has in turn provided the basis for taking the *initiative* in the use of force. The trend culminated in March 2013 when the Council decided that the UN's troubled Congo mission should be strengthened with the creation of a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)—a "milestone" in the evolution of UN peacekeeping, according to the Secretary General at the time (UN 2014)—whose mandate would be "to carry out targeted offensive operations … in a robust, highly mobile and versatile manner" (UN 2013, para. 12b).

When the Secretary-General authorised his review of peace operations in 2014, five of the UN's largest missions—in Darfur, the DRC, the CAR, Mali, and South Sudan—were all operating under Chapter VII, and all were centrally focused on the protection of civilians. The distinctly uneven record of civilian protection in these operations, along with the absence of political progress towards lasting stability in each case, provided the immediate backdrop to the HIPPO and to the continuing discussions about the precise role of force, its limitations, and possibilities in UN peacekeeping.

## Limitations to the Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers

### *Structural Barriers to Military Effectiveness*

In a written submission to the HIPPO in March 2015, some twenty former UN Force Commanders offered a series of detailed recommendations

whose implementation would, in their view, help ensure "success in future peace operations." Penned by Robert Mood, a respected officer with extensive UN experience, the letter stressed the need for "strengthened command and control, improved preparedness and mission design, use of modern technology, enhanced capabilities, improved mission information, and strengthened logistics and support" (Mood 2015). Designed to address long-standing capacity gaps and impediments to operational effectiveness, the proposals ranged widely. Unsurprisingly, given the breath of experiences shared by the signatories to the letter, the recommendations also made good operational sense.

To any long-time observer of UN field operations, however, very few of the deficiencies that the letter sought to address were fundamentally new. The haphazard and unreliable provision of key capacities and force enablers, notably in logistics, intelligence, engineering, aviation support, and reserves; the persistence of complex and cumbersome regulations governing finance, procurement, and human resources; the challenges of force generation and speed of deployment; and the "dysfunctional" nature of relations between the UN in New York and field headquarters, have all long plagued UN peacekeeping.[5] They have also proved remarkably resistant, if not entirely impervious, to substantive reform. The UN's system of human resources management—a distinctly unglamorous but nonetheless critically important area if one is genuinely concerned about improving the effectiveness of UN field operations—illustrates the nature of the problem.

The system was originally set up to cater for a largely static and headquarters-oriented organisation, employing career civil servants primarily engaged in providing administrative support for conferences and meetings among member states. In short, it was emphatically not designed for an organisation where, at present, more than 50 percent of secretariat staff is deployed on operations, many of which require a diverse and complex mix of technical expertise. And yet, the original model and the rules and regulations that go with it, have "never been fundamentally overhauled" (Chandran and von Einsiedel 2016, p. 3). In the words of Chandran and von Einsiedel, seasoned observers of the UN

[5]With regard to challenge of rapid deployment the HIPPO notes in passing that "since a UN standing capacity was first proposed, by the Secretary-General in 1948, no significant progress has been made" (UN 2015, para. 188). For an instructive illustration of the persistence of similar kinds of weaknesses and challenges in UN operations, see Goulding (1997).

scene, "it has proven impossible, again and again, to design a recruitment system that can both satisfy the process requirements for UN headquarters recruitment, while also supporting large, fast-moving field operations."[6] The failure to address these challenges, then, is not new, nor is there a shortage of ideas about how best to tackle them. The problem lies elsewhere: the bureaucratic and, above all, political obstacles to meaningful reform have simply proved too powerful. Indeed, according to the HIPPO, "in operating environments that demand more tailored and flexible UN peace operations it appears that human resources policies may be moving in the opposite direction" (UN 2015, para. 296).

None of this is to suggest that practical efforts to improve the machinery and the effective functioning of UN peacekeeping should be abandoned, nor is it to suggest that previous reform initiatives have all come to naught. Following the recommendations of the Brahimi Panel in 2000, for example, the Secretariat was given greater authority to spend money early in the planning stages of a mission, and important steps were taken to pre-position strategic stocks to ensure more rapid deployment of peacekeepers to the field (Durch et al. 2003). Both were genuinely valuable steps aimed at improving the day-to-day running and conduct of operations. Even so, there remains a natural limit—insufficiently recognised in much of literature on UN reform, including that generated by the Secretariat itself[7]—to which the weaknesses and deficiencies that have historically characterised UN field operations can ever be more than partially mitigated, let alone overcome. The reason for this lies, as noted above, with the *intergovernmental* and intensely *political* nature of the organisation, which will always limit the degree to which a UN Force can work as a truly integrated, cohesive, and effective military force. The implications for the conduct of operations are best illustrated by the perennial challenge of command and control in UN operations.

In their submission to the HIPPO, the former Force Commanders stressed the importance of "One mandate – one mission – one concept,"

[6] Ibid.

[7] See, for example, "Evaluation of the implementation and results of protection of civilian mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations," UN Office of Internal Oversight (UNOIO 2014). While this report usefully collates and catalogues poor and inconsistent implementation of mandates by various missions, it proposes solutions that underplay, if not entirely disregard, the political character of peacekeeping and political sources of TCCs behaviour.

noting that the key to mandate implementation lay in "unity of command under the authority of the SRSG/Head of Mission" (Mood 2015). This insistence on a single chain of command and on maintaining the international character of any UN Force, is not new; indeed, it has been presented as a *sine qua non* of effective UN peacekeeping since its beginning in the 1950s. And yet, it has always come up against the reality of conflicting national priorities, risk-aversion among troop-contributing countries (TCCs), and uncertain loyalty from contingents, factors that have translated into the adoption, spoken or unspoken, of national caveats and a penchant for interfering in the UN chain of command. This has been the case especially when the perceived risks to peacekeepers have been high, and when questions regarding the use of force have been involved. Even so, as long as the peacekeeping environment has proved generally benign, and support from a united Security Council has been in place, UN missions have historically been able to function (with greater of lesser degree of effectiveness) notwithstanding continuing capacity gaps and weaknesses in command and control. Managing such inherent tensions has been a major role of Force Commanders and heads of mission. Indeed, their ability—through improvisation, ingenuity, and flexibility in mandate interpretation—to surmount and work around challenges thrown up by limited resources and a less than optimal system of administrative, managerial, and political support, is among the most important (and under-appreciated) qualities of mission leadership in UN operations.[8]

Developments over the past decade and a half, however, have placed altogether new strains on UN peacekeeping, posing challenges not only for mission leadership but to the very viability of missions themselves. A cursory survey of the five largest UN missions underway in early 2017—accounting for more than 80,000 out of a total of some 115,000 peacekeepers deployed on 16 missions worldwide—shows that operating environments are now, as a general rule, anything but stable and benign.[9] Instead, they typically include a combination or all of the

[8]For an example of how mission leadership helped shepherd an operation through to success *in spite* of the UN machinery designed to assist the mission, see Berdal (2015, pp. 416–429).

[9]These are the missions to South Sudan (UNMISS), Darfur (UNAMID), Mali (MINUSMA), CAR (MINUSCA) and the DRC (MONUSCO), see United Nations (2017). "Peacekeeping operations fact sheet." Accessed 9 November 2017. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/peacekeeping-fact-sheet-oct-2017.

following characteristics: the absence of clear front lines; vast geographical distances amidst war-ravaged, even non-existent, infrastructure; the presence of large numbers of internally displaced; numerous armed groups, often poorly controlled and prone to preying on civilians; and persistent insecurity and on-going violence fuelled by both predatory political economies and power struggles among political elites. Now, the deployment of peacekeepers with a mandate to protect civilians and the authority to engage in robust peacekeeping in these conditions, have had two, partly conflicting, consequences.

First, these conditions have plainly heightened the operational importance of ensuring that UN missions actually do function as cohesive and integrated formations, properly resourced and with the most critical weaknesses—in the areas of tactical mobility, logistics support, and intelligence capacity—addressed. Of these weaknesses, arguably the most urgent requirement, given the non-permissive and volatile nature of contemporary peacekeeping environments, has proved to be the need for more systematic intelligence collection, assessment, and conflict analysis capacities by UN missions, the lack of which in zones of conflict has critically undermined attempts to grapple with underlying political economies of conflict and the way in which these often drive violence and encourage predation against civilian populations.[10] As noted above, however, plugging such capacity gaps has proved difficult to achieve even in the best of circumstances. The result when it comes to POC, as the Brahimi Panel Report perceptively foresaw back in 2000, has been to create a very "large mismatch between desired objective and resources available to meet it," as well as to guarantee "continuing disappointment with United Nations follow through in this area [of civilian protection]" (UN 2000, para. 63).

Second, these very conditions have also heightened differences among TCCs about how mandates should be interpreted and, specifically, over attitudes to the use of force. This, again, has further undermined efforts to achieve Force cohesion and unity of purpose, in many cases pushing the mission beyond the "outer limits for UN peacekeeping [as] defined by their composition, character and inherent capability limitations" (UN 2015, p. x). Significantly, TCCs that now provide the bulk of

[10]For this, see Kristof Titeca and Daniel Fahey's (2016) study of MONUSCO's failure to comprehend the character and dynamics driving the actions of the rebel group known as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the DRC between 2014 and 2016. For the consequences of relying on flawed intelligence, see also Fahey (2016, pp. 91–100).

peacekeepers, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, as well as many contributors from Latin America, remain deeply sceptical of the trend in favour of more robust use of force by UN peacekeepers (Modi 2015).

### *Limitations to the Third-Party Use of Force in Conditions of Civil War and Internal Conflict*

The second set of limitations to the use of force connects still more directly to the context of internal conflict. A UN peacekeeping force that is deployed within the jurisdiction of a sovereign state where the host government is faced with internal challenges to its authority will, over time, find it increasingly difficult to remain above the domestic political fray, however much it may formally aspire to do so. Alan James, writing about the UN's involvement in Congo in the early 1960s, pinpointed the elemental reason for this: "On an internal scene a government is but one of the actors; in one degree or another the political balance is likely to be in constant movement; and the way in which a UN force responds may well have some impact on the balance, or – which in effect comes to the same thing – be seen as shifting the balance" (James 1994, p. 46). For UN peacekeepers to take the initiative in the use of force—especially, but not merely, when force is used in support of the host government—cannot but have an impact on that political balance, and will also affect the military and political calculations of other conflict actors. As such, it runs the risk of undermining the UN's chief asset as an interlocutor in internal conflicts and the search for political solutions: its perceived impartiality in relation to major disputants. In the words of Jean Marie Guéhenno, reflecting on the UN's post-Cold War experience in Congo:

> …if the UN becomes the auxiliary of a government whose legitimacy and representativeness is still questioned, it may lose not only its military but its political legitimacy, putting at risk what is potentially it most valuable contribution: the capacity to foster compromise among various groups as the indispensable base of lasting peace. (Guéhenno 2015, p. 147)

The UN's Congo experience highlights another inescapable risk associated with the enforced and prolonged proximity of UN missions to host governments in situations of on-going internal conflict. In all such cases, even if consent for the UN's presence remains formally in place, relations between missions and host governments have tended to deteriorate

as host governments—often weak and beset by internal challenges, suspicious of outside meddling and protective of their sovereign rights—become ever more resentful of obstacles to their unfettered control over internal affairs. When, as is now overwhelmingly the case, the mandates given to UN missions are themselves politically intrusive and include potentially conflicting objectives, tensions have only been further heightened, with the result that both the credibility and leverage of UN missions have dwindled over time. Perhaps nowhere has this dynamic been more evident than in the DRC and South Sudan where the UN has been charged with protecting civilians as well as with monitoring government observance with human rights obligations and supporting security sector reform, and yet where, in both cases, government security forces have proved to be major sources of violence against civilians. Indeed, according to the UN's own reporting "the Congolese state was responsible for roughly 65% of the human rights violations [in 2016], and in many parts of the country the army is seen by local communities as the most dangerous armed group" (Day 2017, p. 2). Reviewing the period before the eruption of full-scale civil war in South Sudan in December 2013, an assessment of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) concluded that "intractable problems, near-impossible dilemmas and difficult trade-offs will be a constant, especially given its decision to take on multiple, at times, conflicting roles" (Hemmer 2013, p. 8; da Costa and de Coning 2015). It is a finding equally applicable to other operations where the UN is deployed in intrastate settings in the absence of a viable political process.

## Lessons in Robustness: The Use of Force from Haiti to the DRC

Mindful of these structural and political limitations to the use force by UN peacekeepers, what lessons for future operations should one draw from the experience of robust peacekeeping over the past decade and a half? The answer to that question needs to start with the recognition, or reaffirmation, of the importance of upholding the basic, albeit broad, distinction between what is essentially a peacekeeping operation and one that is premised on the logic of war-fighting and enforcement. It is equally important, however, to be clear about what exactly this means in practise, and what implications flow from it. The meaning of

"essentially" in this context has little to do with whether or not a mission has been formally authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter; by now, almost all are as a matter of routine. The key to the distinction lies in whether or not achieving mission objectives—including the larger and key strategic objective of reaching a political settlement to end violence—is fundamentally dependent, in the final analysis, on building consent and support for the activities of peacekeepers among the parties. The history of peacekeeping since 1999 shows just how fragmentary and incomplete such consent can be, nowhere more so than when peacekeepers operate in conditions of civil war. Combining activities that rely on consent, cooperation, and access with offensive military operations, all within the same mission, have historically proved highly destabilising, politically as well as in humanitarian terms. For all its finely balanced and properly justified criticism of UN actions in Bosnia, that conclusion was also at the heart of the Srebrenica Report issued in 1999: "peacekeeping and war fighting are distinct activities and should not be mixed" (UN 1999a, 107). An inescapable corollary of this is that there will also be circumstances when the instrument of peacekeeping is not appropriate. The history of UN operations over the past decade and a half does not fundamentally alter these lessons.

Now, while the qualitative distinction between peacekeeping and enforcement must be reaffirmed, it does not follow from the above that the UN can or should *only* operate in environments where distinctions are clear-cut and simple, or that the use of force cannot, at the margins and in the right circumstances, be used with, potentially, decisive effect. There are instances since 1999 when properly equipped and properly commanded forces have scored tactical victories in response to immediate crises and emergencies: preventing the collapse of the UN mission Sierra Leone in 2000; dismantling the gang-structures Haiti in 2006–2007; securing Bunia in eastern DRC in 2003 and in defeating Laurent Gbabgo's violent challenge to the outcome of elections in Cote d'Ivoire in 2011. In evaluating these tactical successes, however, it is vital not to lose sight of the wider, and more critical, lessons offered by each case.

For one, all of these involved well-equipped, competently led and highly capable forces (drawn from the UK in the case of Sierra Leone, Brazil in the case of Haiti and France in the case of Bunia and Cote d'Ivoire), precisely what UN missions have tended to lack. Moreover, the military challenge faced in each case, though real enough, was mounted by marginal and, ultimately, militarily unimpressive actors. Still

more important than these qualifications, however, is the fact that the long-term strategic outcome of these and similar actions depends critically on whether or not the use of force has been properly calibrated to support an overall strategy aimed at reducing violence, mitigating conflict, and fostering a political solution to the conflict at hand. Whether the actions of UN peacekeepers, including the use of military force, serve to advance these kinds of strategic objectives is, ultimately, the true measure of their effectiveness. And yet, with the partial exception of Sierra Leone, the all-important link between military action and political purpose has been weak to non-existent in UN operations since 1999.

In Sierra Leone, the UK military intervention in 2000 was able to check, at a critical moment, advances by the RUF and other armed groups in the country. Crucially, however, this short, sharp, and limited action was followed by concerted diplomatic moves aimed at shoring up the post-war political dispensation in the country; moves that included a sustained effort to galvanise others to contribute to a beefed up and reconfigured UN mission, as well as a serious and long-term commitment to reforming and professionalising the country's armed forces (Riley 2006, 2). As one detailed study of the use of force by British forces in Sierra Leone makes clear, even though the "use of force was critical in creating an opportunity for political progress, it was not in itself decisive or even that strategically significant"—long-term success was contingent on political follow-up at the UN and regionally, underpinned by a plausibly effective programme of security sector reform (Ucko 2016).

In Haiti, by contrast, "tactical success through the use of force led to only limited strategic payoffs in the larger state consolidation mission, with MINUSTAH struggling to integrate the use of force into a larger project for Haitian political and economic transformation."[11] A similar picture emerges from the various applications of robust force in the DRC, including *Operation Artemis* in 2003 and the Ituri campaign of 2005.[12] The record of MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade since 2013—the most ambitious attempt to conduct offensive operations

[11] Cockayne (2014, p. 738). Echoing these conclusions, see also Guéhenno (2015, pp. 261–262).

[12] Discussed more fully in Berdal (2016, pp. 11–17).

within a peacekeeping setting—has proved even more troubling, with mounting evidence in 2016 that the force through its actions has, if anything, contributed to a worsening of the security situation in eastern DRC.[13] In the words of one Senior Political Advisor working for in MONUSCO throughout 2016: "Not only has it failed to degrade the militias it was tasked to fight, but the FIB has potentially increased risks to civilians and diverted resources away from activities that might well serve them better."[14]

Taken together, what all of these cases do is to underline a basic lesson from the UN's experience of "robust peacekeeping": UN peacekeeping missions are structurally ill-equipped and politically ill-suited to use force effectively in support of strategic objectives, and when they have attempted to do so in a political vacuum without proper resources, the medium to long-term consequence of their actions have been, more often than not, to destabilise the operating environment and complicate the search for political solutions.[15] Even so, it is worth stressing again that none of this is to rule out the use of force by peacekeepers in all circumstances. The operations discussed here have all shown that in fluid and complex internal settings with multiple conflict actors, it will sometimes be possible and, indeed, necessary to differentiate between *major* disputants, loosely defined as political and militarily significant actors, and more marginal spoilers, distinguished by their predatory agendas and, crucially, their lack of local legitimacy. Decisive military action against the latter may have a stabilising effect in the short term. Any lasting effect or achievement resulting from the use of force, however, will always, in the final analysis, depend on whether or not military action is "framed as an enabling component of a political strategy" (Doss 2014, p. 730).

[13]Congo Research Group (2017). Since late 2016, there have been frequent clashes between the Congolese Army and the M-23, the Rwanda-backed rebel group which the FIB was initially credited with having successfully having defeated back in 2013.

[14]Day (2017, p. 2). This article provides an excellent assessment of the FIB's failure in the DRC.

[15]Although beyond the scope of the present chapter, it is worth noting that the war-fighting role given to the FIB in the DRC has also raised legal issues relating to the use of force that ought properly to be considered in any wider discussion of challenges and limitations to the use of force in UN peacekeeping. For an excellent discussion see Sheeran and Case (2014).

## Concluding Thoughts: Re-establishing the Link Between Military Force and Political Purpose

When Jean-Marie Guéhenno, then head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), visited the DRC in March 2006 to take stock of the challenges facing MONUC on the eve of the first elections in the country for 41 years, he used the occasion also to assess the impact of "the robust and unprecedented manner" in which UN military forces, operating alongside and in support of the Congolese army (FARDC), had sought out and engaged armed groups over the previous year. The results, he found, were decidedly mixed, with the "negative consequences" of UN military operations—including reprisals against civilians by armed groups targeted by the UN, new "waves" of internally displaced and uncontrolled looting, pillaging and abuses committed by the elements of MONUC's ally, the Congolese army—all suggesting the need to shift away from aggressive pursuit and "to start taking a longer-view." As he perceptively reported back to New York, "the reality is that foreign armed groups will need to be dealt with in the longer-term, in tandem with an economic and political strategy, and in a way that does not threaten civilian populations" (UN 2006). More than a decade on from Guéhenno's visit, with the DRC still faced with political stasis, violence and humanitarian crisis, his recommendations remain, sadly, just as appropriate as they were back in 2006 (Gowan 2016). They also point to wider lessons for UN peacekeeping that transcend the particular circumstances of the DRC.

In the end, perhaps the single most important implication to flow from the analysis above is that UN peacekeeping in and of itself—and most certainly robust peacekeeping of the kind attempted over the past decade and a half—can only ever play a very limited part in helping to address the deeper sources of violent conflict in fragile and conflict-ridden states. UN peacekeepers can undertake a range of ancillary tasks aimed at strengthening and helping in the search for lasting political settlement to conflicts. That range is now longer and more complex than it was in the era of "classical" peacekeeping and includes security sector reform, support for humanitarian relief operations, complex monitoring, and confidence-building tasks. When conditions require and resources permit—as operations in Sierra Leone, Haiti and even at times the DRC have shown—UN forces may also be in a position to respond locally to obstructionist violence or immediate emergencies and defeat

"marginal actors" (Guéhenno 2015, p. 262). These are all important tasks and the scope for improving the quality of delivery in each is certainly there, especially in the vital area of security sector reform, which, too often, has been under-funded, overly technocratic in approach and ignorant of the political economies of conflict on the ground. But they are *ancillary* tasks in the sense that their lasting contribution to addressing conflict depends not only on how effectively they are delivered in a technical sense but, crucially, on whether they are aligned to and help advance the overriding objective of arriving at political agreements to end violence. A key and concluding implication to flow from this is that UN mission leaderships in the field, aided by the secretariat and backed by the Security Council, must—through improved political engagement, effective use of good offices, and enhanced analytical capacities—prioritise the search for political avenues and opportunities that promise ways out of conflict and protracted violence.

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